



## Texas Organization of Rural & Community Hospitals

Chairman Julius Genachowski  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 12th Street, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20554

May 23, 2011

Dear Chairman Genachowski:

The Texas Organization of Rural & Community Hospitals (TORCH) brings hospitals, corporations, and interested individuals together to address the special needs and issues of rural and community hospitals, staff, and the patients they serve. We feel the approval of a pending merger between T-Mobile Wireless and AT&T could address many of those special needs and issues and hope the deal moves forward with your consent.

As we look toward the future, we see the added challenges of bringing new information technology into the rural landscape as one of our highest priorities. High-speed, wireless Internet is seemingly everywhere—restaurants, parks, even onboard airplanes. And yet there are many rural areas that are still sadly underserved.

Perhaps that wouldn't be as serious a concern if the Internet were still used mainly for information and entertainment. But, the fact is, mobile broadband will soon eliminate many problems associated with the distance between rural hospitals and their patients. Imagine a doctor in a rural hospital making the rounds while hosting a virtual office visit, counseling a patient with limited mobility about an important health issue that otherwise would have required an hour-long drive and the help of a family member. That could soon be possible with broadband service supporting real-time, interactive telemedicine.

In this sense, high-speed Internet is a requisite, not a luxury. People shouldn't receive different levels of health care based on their location or access to technology. If technology makes better treatment possible, then it should be available to everyone one day soon.

The T-Mobile/AT&T merger would clearly accelerate the arrival of that day. The merger would add a coverage area of over a million square miles, making mobile broadband available to 55 million people more than AT&T currently planned to do. That network would represent about 97 percent coverage nationwide, including many rural areas receiving mobile broadband for the first time.

Although we contend that this deal will be good for the country, the Commission has the responsibility regardless to consider what is best for people. However, as far as those living in rural areas and needing quality health care are concerned, approving this merger is an easy decision.

With Regards,

David Pearson, FACHE, MPA  
President/CEO

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